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The President's Daily Brief

March 19, 1975

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Exempt from general
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exemption category 5B(1)(2)(3)
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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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CAMBODIA

President Lon Nol may be seriously considering leaving the country at the behest of his closest political supporters.

Prime Minister Long Boret called on Lon Nol Monday to inform him that a number of Asian diplomats in Phnom Penh believe that Lon Nol's departure would improve the chances for a favorable US Congressional vote on supplemental aid for Cambodia.

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Socio-Republican leaders--with the exception of Lon Nol's younger brother Lon Non--met late on Monday and unanimously agreed to advise that both Lon Nol and Lon Non go abroad. The party leaders were planning to meet with Lon Nol late yesterday and tell him that it would not be necessary for him to resign, but that he should depart and leave the affairs of state in the hands of the new cabinet Long Boret is forming.

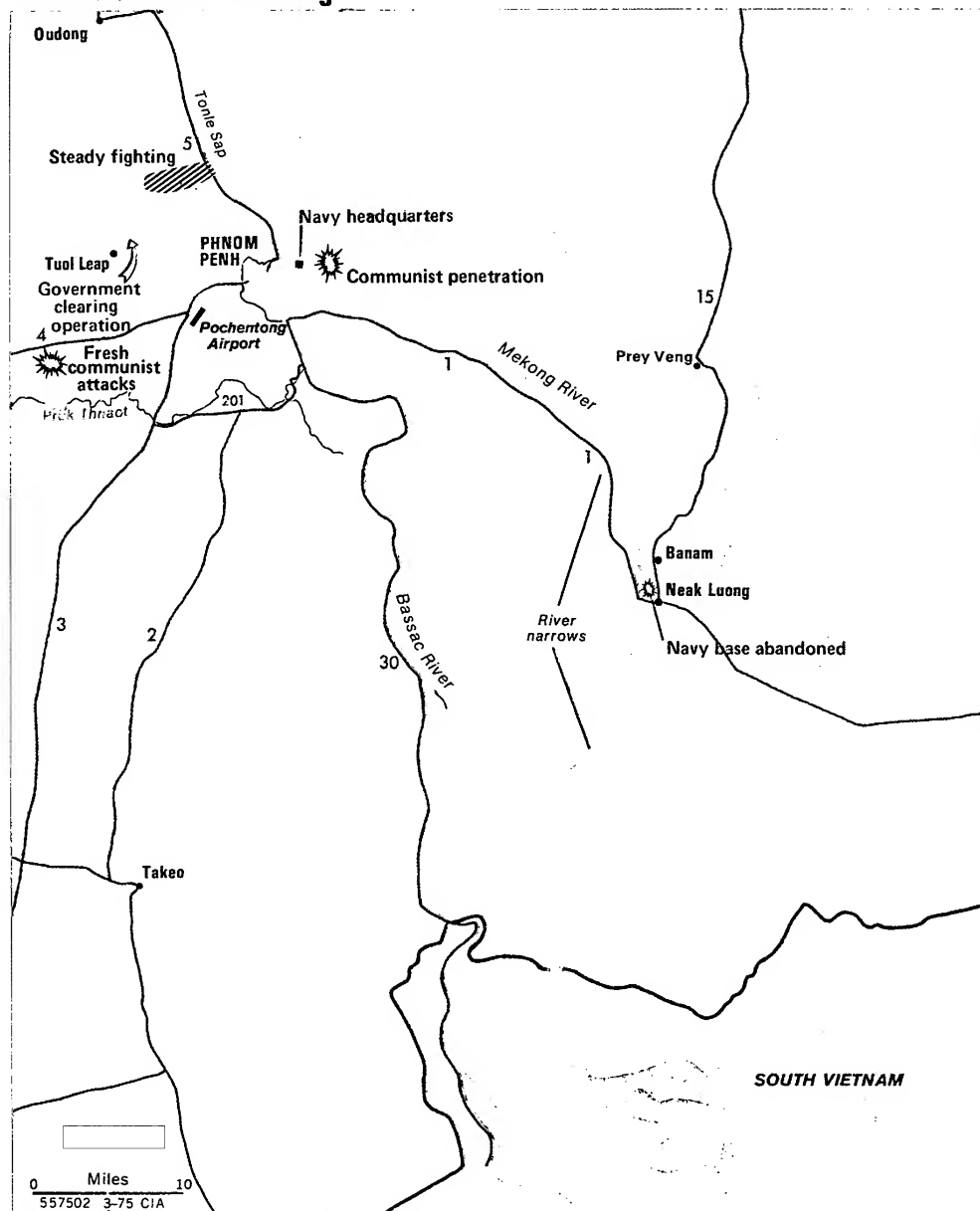
Long Boret and a Socio-Republican representative met separately with Ambassador Dean and his Deputy Chief of Mission on Monday and Tuesday to elicit US reaction to these developments. Both US officials were non-committal, stressing that the Cambodians themselves were responsible for their internal political affairs. Ambassador Dean doubts that there is any comprehensive plan behind these efforts to encourage the President's departure, but only a hope that this would result in a favorable vote on supplemental aid and buy the government time in which to try to arrange a compromise settlement with the communists.

Under present circumstances, it seems almost certain that the insurgents would read Lon Nol's departure as a sign of political unraveling in Phnom Penh, and that they would continue to press their military campaign until the government is forced to accept a settlement on communist terms.

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Cambodia: Lower Mekong



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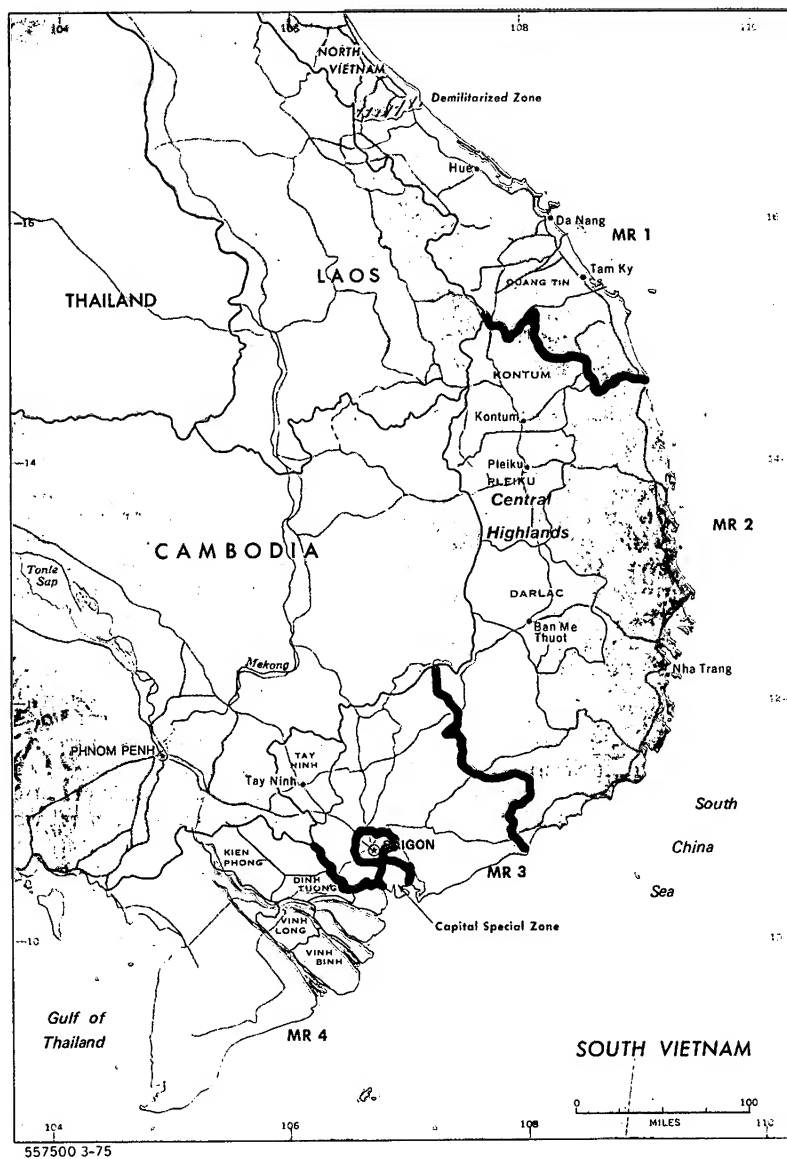
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The government operation to eliminate Khmer communist rocket-firing positions near the town of Tuol Leap is making some progress, despite logistic and coordination problems. Rocket attacks against Pochentong airport are less frequent, probably because insurgent crews have to keep moving to avoid government units and air strikes. The communists have launched fresh attacks against government positions near Route 4 west of the airport and are keeping steady pressure on Phnom Penh's northern defenses, apparently in an effort to divert government forces from the Tuol Leap operation.

Along the Mekong River near the capital, a communist penetration of an area directly opposite the city's waterfront has forced the postponement of government plans to push insurgent mortar and recoilless rifle crews out of range of the main navy headquarters.

Farther south on the river, the government enclave around Neak Luong and the nearby town of Banam remain targets of intense communist shelling. Neak Luong is packed with some 30,000 refugees, and civilian casualties are mounting. The navy lost three patrol boats when the navy base just off Neak Luong was abandoned late Monday night. Thirteen navy vessels and all personnel from the base and a nearby island safely reached government lines.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

Heavy fighting continues, with the communists increasing their attacks along the north-central coast and on the approaches to Saigon. A potentially critical situation is developing in the northern provinces of Military Region 1, where the government is speeding the withdrawal of the airborne division. Only two battalions of marines are scheduled to replace the airborne forces.

The departure of the full airborne division has upset the regional commander's plans to reinforce Quang Tin Province; he no longer can augment the forces in that province and expects it to fall to the communists. North Vietnamese units have increased pressure on Tam Ky, the provincial capital.

_____ Saigon will not send additional munitions to the region--at least for the time being--fearing that the munitions would fall into communist hands.

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The airborne division's 3rd Brigade, which was in the process of moving to Saigon, will now be diverted to Military Region 2. The remnants of the government units that had fought at Ban Me Thuot in Darlac Province, including the 23rd Division and ranger units, are having a tough time making their way out. Even if the 23rd Division can regroup along the coast, it will not be an effective combat unit for some time. President Thieu has abandoned plans to recapture Ban Me Thuot.

The communists apparently captured all nine Americans, including American missionaries and an official of the US Agency for International Development, who were in Ban Me Thuot when it fell. A Viet Cong radiobroadcast alluded to the Americans on March 16. It maintained that "foreigners, including honest Americans, will be well treated and released if they are captured, but this treatment will not be given to US military advisers. They are special cases because they have violated the Paris Agreement."

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The withdrawal of civilians and military personnel from Kontum and Pleiku provinces is continuing. As of late yesterday, an estimated 200,000 had left Kontum and Pleiku cities. Although the communists have cut the highway the refugees are using, the North Vietnamese are allowing the people to move out of the area. An intercept indicates, however, that the communists are moving into position to attack a South Vietnamese military convoy retreating from the highlands.

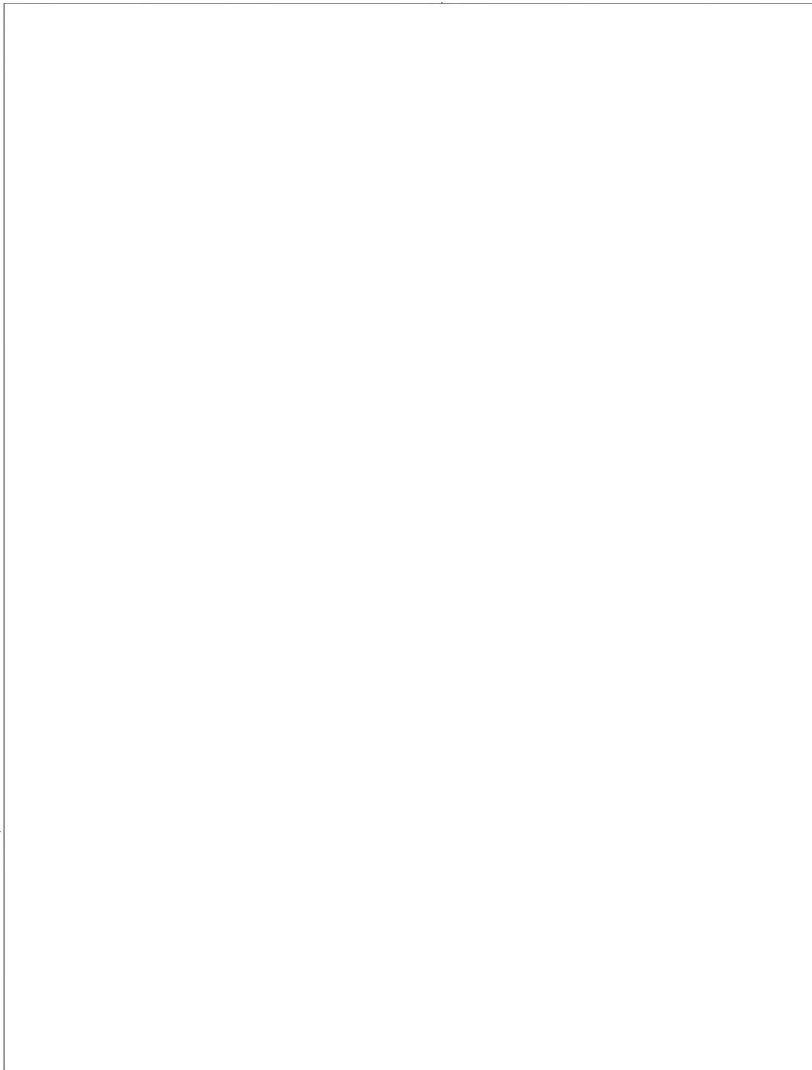
In Military Region 3, there is heavy fighting in Tay Ninh Province, but there have been no significant losses since Monday, when a key outpost east of Tay Ninh City fell. Most South Vietnamese regulars in the area have fought well thus far. Regional forces, however, have abandoned a number of remote outposts in the face of communist tanks.

In the delta, a major new battle appears to be shaping up near the border of Kien Phong and Dinh Tuong provinces. A North Vietnamese division is concentrated in this area, and the government is moving to challenge it.

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USSR

General Secretary Brezhnev, speaking at the Hungarian party congress in Budapest yesterday, presented a sober, positive reiteration of Soviet foreign policy positions. Brezhnev said the USSR is giving "most serious attention" to consolidating relations with the US; otherwise he said relatively little about bilateral matters. He made no mention of you or of his coming trip to the US.

Brezhnev devoted considerable attention to European matters--no surprise given the venue of the speech. He referred to progress at CSCE and to the prospect of its "summit-level" wind-up in the coming months. He did not mention June 30--a date he proposed for the summit finale in letters to Western leaders earlier this month. Brezhnev did indicate that with CSCE out of the way, greater attention could be given to "military detente." He referred to the MBFR talks in Vienna and the Vladivostok agreements on strategic arms limitation. In this context he spoke of the "gradual reduction," as well as limitation, of armed forces and armaments. He observed this is not a matter that could be decided "overnight."

For his East European audience, Brezhnev referred positively to the contributions of the Warsaw Pact and CEMA, alleging that the East has done a better job than the West in promoting economic growth and stability at a time of worldwide economic trouble. At the same time, he admitted that Eastern Europe and the USSR would have to coordinate economic planning more effectively in order to meet the problems raised by higher prices for energy.

On the "crisis of capitalism," Brezhnev picked up the theme that the West's economic woes have strengthened the hand of reactionary elements, and hence, are a source of potential trouble for the USSR. He gave a nod to the importance of stepping up the ideological struggle around the globe.

Brezhnev hewed close to the standard Soviet line on the Middle East. He made no reference to Secretary Kissinger's current round of negotiations.

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He referred to the importance of resuming negotiations in Geneva, satisfying the rights of the Palestinians--including the creation of their own "state entity"--and ensuring the existence of "all" states, by which he means Israel as well as the Arab nations, in the Middle East.

The Soviet party chief did not mention China directly, and made only passing references to problems in Asia.

Brezhnev seemed in good health.

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PORTUGAL

Portugal's newly created Revolutionary Council yesterday banned political activity by the center-right Christian Democratic Party and two far-left groups until after the election scheduled for April 12. The leader of the Christian Democratic Party has been accused of complicity in the coup attempt of March 11. At least one of the two leftist groups has frequently criticized both the Armed Forces Movement and the Communist Party and is expected to continue political violence.

The moderately conservative Social Democratic Center was not included in the ban. The loss of its records during extremist attacks on party offices following the attempted coup, however, will make it difficult for it to organize an effective election campaign.

Vitor Alves, a minister without portfolio, told a US embassy source yesterday that an announcement is imminent that the election will be postponed. This lends substance to rumors that the balloting may be put off until April 25, the first anniversary of the overthrow of the Caetano regime.

The cabinet shuffle that was authorized on March 12 has still not materialized. The delay suggests Prime Minister Goncalves is having difficulty finding suitable candidates or in obtaining agreement for his recommended changes.

Continuing rumors of a marked shift to the left are somewhat supported by Goncalves' statement last week that he would bring members of the Portuguese Democratic Movement--a communist front--into the government. Communist Secretary General Cunhal has recently attacked the center-left Popular Democratic Party. He claims that the Popular Democrats, by engaging in reactionary propaganda, have abandoned their position as a member of the democratic coalition government.

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UK

The white paper [redacted] outlining the results of the year-long defense review maintains Britain's position as a major force within NATO, while meeting some of the demands of the ruling Labor Party's left-wing for defense cuts.

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The defense review in effect:

- Retains all essential equipment programs.
- Maintains Britain's contribution to NATO's central region.
- Reduces Britain's ability to operate in and reinforce NATO's flanks.
- Increases slightly in real terms expenditures in fiscal 1975 and 1976.
- Postpones projected "savings" until after 1980, well beyond the term of the current Labor government.

The government is not expected to have much difficulty getting parliamentary approval for its defense plans. Left-wing Laborites, however, will continue to press for further cuts. This, however, would probably mean additional unemployment.

Britain's NATO allies, which have been examining the defense review for the past several months, have accepted the British proposals, although with some reservations.

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CANADA

Prime Minister Trudeau has returned from a relatively unproductive 17-day tour of West European capitals to a domestic scene characterized by growing labor unrest, inflationary wage settlements, charges of corruption touching his own Liberal Party, and criticism of his failure to reach definitive arrangements in Europe. During his tour, the Prime Minister emphasized Canada's desire to balance its dependence on the US with a "contractual" relationship with the European Community.

In The Hague, Bonn, Rome, London, and Dublin, Trudeau found polite listeners but no firm commitments. The Europeans apparently are waiting for the Canadians to define what they want in a "contractual" relationship.

The EC is considering three alternative approaches to the Canadian request: a commercial agreement, an agreement establishing a framework for industrial cooperation, or postponement of negotiations with Canada until the current multilateral trade negotiations in Geneva are concluded.

An obstacle to an agreement with the EC is Canada's desire to become an exporter of finished products rather than to remain a supplier of raw materials. The EC countries prefer to tap Canada's mineral and timber resources and to market their own finished products.

In West Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy, Trudeau urged the prompt ratification of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Ottawa is anxious to sell Canadian nuclear power reactors in these markets. After India used material from a Canadian-supplied reactor to explode a nuclear device last year, Canada has insisted that no nuclear deals can be made with any nation that has not ratified the Non-Proliferation Treaty and agreed to additional bilateral safeguards arrangements.

Italian officials assured Trudeau that their ratification of the treaty was progressing rapidly and would soon be presented to parliament. West Germany and the Netherlands indicated they were waiting for the Italians to ratify the treaty before concluding their own ratification process.

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NOTES

The NATO allies have decided to answer Soviet party chief Brezhnev's letter of last week by telling him that they will agree to conclude the European Security Conference with a summit meeting this summer only if outstanding issues are resolved first.

NATO members on Monday also discussed whether they should hold a Western summit to discuss the security conference before the end of the conference itself. The allies believe that a Western summit could be used to counter any public impression that the security conference represents a final solution to East-West problems. They also believe, however, that a Western summit might have the effect of giving too much emphasis to Western concessions, thus increasing the problems they will have justifying conference results to their publics. On balance, the representatives felt that the disadvantages outweighed the advantages.

* * *

Herbert Chitepo, the prominent Rhodesian insurgent leader who was killed yesterday in a bomb explosion outside his home in Lusaka, Zambia, may have been a victim of feuding within the African nationalist movement.

Intense rivalry has persisted among the nationalist groups since they merged last December, and [redacted] serious feuding has been taking place in Zambia among supporters of the former Zimbabwe African National Union, of which Chitepo was a major leader. Prime Minister Ian Smith will point to Chitepo's death as an example of the dissension among the nationalists that prevents progress toward a negotiated settlement in Rhodesia.

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